



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**STUDENTS' ENGLISH PROFICIENCY, PERCEPTUAL LEARNING
STYLE PREFERENCE AND SECOND LANGUAGE TOLERANCE OF
AMBIGUITY**

RAFIZAH BINTI MOHD RAWIAN

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By

RAFIZAH BINTI MOHD RAWIAN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
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of Science**

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in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

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**Chairperson : Professor Haji Othman bin Dato' Haji Mohamed,
Ph.D.**

Faculty : Educational Studies

The purpose of this study was to examine students' English proficiency, perceptual learning style preference and tolerance of ambiguity.

A total of 314 respondents were randomly sampled from four secondary schools in the District of Hulu Langat. A descriptive correlational study was utilised and the theoretical framework of the study was based on several models of learning. The Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire was used to investigate respondents' perceptual learning style preference. This questionnaire categorised the students into auditory, kinesthetic, tactile and visual

learners. The Second Language Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale was used to measure respondents' levels of ambiguity tolerance. English proficiency was evaluated based on respondents' PMR English grades. Frequency distribution, independent *t* test and Pearson correlation test were used to analyse the data. The study found that the male and female students had chosen the kinesthetic learning style as a major learning style while the tactile and the visual learning styles were selected as minor learning styles. However, there was a difference in the auditory learning style preference because the females had regarded this learning style as a major learning style while the males had considered it as a minor style. The Malays, Chinese and Indians had selected the kinesthetic learning style as a major learning style and regarded the tactile and visual learning styles as minor styles. The auditory learning style was a major style for the Indians but it was considered as a minor learning style for the Malays and Chinese. The Malays had stronger preference in tactile learning style and the Chinese were found to have stronger preference in visual learning style. The Indians on the other hand had stronger preference in auditory learning style.

Both the Science and Arts majors regarded the kinesthetic learning style as a major learning style while the tactile and the visual styles were considered as minor styles. The Science major had selected the auditory learning style as a major style and the Arts major

considered it as a minor style. The science students showed stronger preferences in kinesthetic, auditory and visual learning styles. The Arts students were identified as having stronger preference in tactile learning style. The overall analysis revealed that the respondents performed better in the listening examination followed by the oral and the written examinations. None of the respondents had a very high level of ambiguity tolerance. The males had a high level of ambiguity tolerance and the females had a moderate level of ambiguity tolerance. The Malays were found to be high tolerant learners while the Chinese and Indians were moderate tolerant learners. The Science major was identified as having high level of ambiguity tolerance whereas the Arts major was recognised as having a moderate level of ambiguity tolerance. The Pearson correlation analysis showed weak, negative but significant correlations between the modes of perceptual learning style and English proficiency. Positive, strong and significant correlation was found between tolerance of ambiguity and English proficiency. However, weak but significant correlation was identified between modes of perceptual learning style and tolerance of ambiguity.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**TAHAP KEFASIHAN BAHASA INGGERIS, PERSEPSI KEUTAMAAN
STAIL PEMBELAJARAN DAN TOLERANSI AMBIGUITI DALAM
BAHASA KEDUA**

Oleh

**RAFIZAH BINTI MOHD RAWIAN
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Kajian ini bertujuan mengenalpasti tahap kefasihan Bahasa Inggeris, persepsi keutamaan stail pembelajaran dan toleransi ambiguiti dalam bahasa kedua.

Seramai 314 responden telah dipilih secara rawak dari empat buah sekolah menengah di daerah Hulu Langat. Kajian deskriptif kolerasi yang berpandukan kepada beberapa teori pembelajaran telah digunapakai. Soal selidik stail pembelajaran perseptual telah digunakan untuk mengkaji stail pembelajaran perseptual responden. Melalui soal selidik ini, pelajar-pelajar telah dikategorikan kepada stail pembelajaran auditori, kinestetik, tektail dan visual. Skala toleransi

ambiguity dalam bahasa kedua atau “Second Language Tolerance of Ambiguity” pula telah digunakan untuk menguji tahap toleransi ambiguity responden. Tahap kefasihan Bahasa Inggeris pelajar telah dinilai berpandukan kepada keputusan peperiksaan Bahasa Inggeris di peringkat PMR. Frekuensi, ujian t dan kolerasi Pearson telah dijalankan untuk menganalisa data yang diperolehi. Kajian mendapati pelajar-pelajar lelaki dan perempuan telah memilih stail pembelajaran kinestetik sebagai stail pembelajaran yang utama dan stail pembelajaran tektail dan visual dipilih sebagai stail pembelajaran yang minor. Pelajar-pelajar perempuan telah memilih stail pembelajaran auditori sebagai stail pembelajaran yang utama tetapi pelajar-pelajar lelaki menganggapnya sebagai satu stail yang minor. Ketiga-tiga kaum iaitu Melayu, Cina dan India telah memilih stail pembelajaran kinestetik sebagai stail yang utama dan menganggap tektail dan visual sebagai stail yang minor. Stail pembelajaran auditori adalah stail minor bagi pelajar-pelajar Melayu dan Cina tetapi ianya stail yang utama bagi pelajar India. Pelajar-pelajar Melayu lebih menyukai stail pembelajaran tektail berbanding dengan kaum-kaum yang lain. Pelajar-pelajar Cina pula didapati lebih menyukai stail pembelajaran visual manakala pelajar-pelajar India lebih cenderung kepada stail pembelajaran auditori.

Pelajar-pelajar jurusan Sains dan Sastera telah memilih stail pembelajaran kinestetik sebagai stail utama dan memilih tektail serta

visual sebagai stail-stail pembelajaran yang minor. Pelajar-pelajar jurusan Sains telah memilih stail pembelajaran auditori sebagai stail utama tetapi ianya satu stail pembelajaran yang minor bagi pelajar-pelajar jurusan Sastera. Pelajar-pelajar jurusan Sains lebih cenderung kepada stail pembelajaran kinestetik, auditori dan visual. Pelajar-pelajar jurusan Sastera pula lebih menyukai stail pembelajaran tektail. Analisa keseluruhan kajian mendapati pencapaian responden adalah lebih baik didalam ujian pendengaran dan ini diikuti oleh pencapaian ujian lisan dan ujian bertulis. Tiada seorang responden didapati mempunyai tahap toleransi ambiguiti yang tertinggi. Pelajar-pelajar lelaki mempunyai tahap toleransi ambiguiti yang tinggi dan pelajar-pelajar perempuan mempunyai tahap toleransi ambiguiti yang sederhana. Pelajar-pelajar Melayu mempunyai tahap toleransi ambiguiti yang tinggi manakala pelajar-pelajar Cina dan India mempunyai tahap toleransi ambiguiti yang sederhana. Pelajar-pelajar jurusan Sains didapati mempunyai tahap toleransi ambiguiti yang tinggi dan pelajar-pelajar jurusan Sastera mempunyai tahap toleransi ambiguiti yang sederhana. Ujian kolerasi Pearson menunjukkan kolerasi yang negatif, lemah tetapi signifikan di antara stail pembelajaran perseptual dengan kefasihan Bahasa Inggeris. Sebaliknya kolerasi yang positif, kuat dan signifikan diantara toleransi ambiguiti dan kefasihan Bahasa Inggeris telah diperolehi. Selain itu, korelasi diantara stail pembelajaran perseptual dan toleransi ambiguiti dikenal pasti sebagai lemah tetapi signifikan.

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I certify that an Examination Committee met on 2nd December 2002 to conduct the final examination of Rafizah binti Mohd Rawian on her Master of Science thesis entitled "Students' English Proficiency, Perceptual Learning Style Preference and Second Language Tolerance of Ambiguity" in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulation 1981. The committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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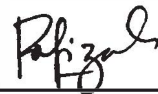
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.



RAFIZAH MOHD RAWIAN

Date: 25 . 1 . 2003

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A	Auditory Learning Style
ESL	English as a Second Language
F	Female
K	Kinesthetic Learning Style
L2	Second Language
LS	Learning Style
M	Male
PMR	Penilaian Menengah Rendah or Lower Secondary Assessment
PLSPQ	Perceptual Learning Styles Preferences Questionnaire
SMAPK	Sekolah Menengah Agama Persekutuan Kajang
SMYH	Sekolah Menengah Yu Hua
SMJB	Sekolah Menengah Jalan Bukit
SAAS	Sekolah Menengah Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
T	Tactile Learning Style
V	Visual Learning Style

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Quality is a concept in education that is closely related to the standard and effectiveness of classroom instruction and it has now become an increasingly crucial issue. Learning process is viewed in depth to unfold aspects that are significant to learning success. A number of classroom-based researches have been done to gain insight into the actual scenario of teaching and learning. The main objective of these studies is to assist educators to come up with new strategies and resources to enrich the teaching-learning experiences including second language acquisition.

The importance of English language as a second language (L2) in Malaysia is indisputable. At present, English is still the second language used in Malaysia after Bahasa Malaysia, the main medium of instruction in schools. English language is one of the compulsory subjects for all students in primary as well as in secondary schools (Huraian Sukatan Pelajaran Bahasa Inggeris Tingkatan IV, 1990). Although the importance of English is fully acknowledged, students' English language proficiency is declining. There are students who still cannot speak English fluently even though they have studied the language for many years in schools. There are also a large number of students who still cannot read or write in English (Jamali, 1992). One of

the main questions posed by researchers in second language learning is why some students learn English effectively and successfully while others with the same opportunities fail to learn. Jamali (1992) pointed out five major factors that contribute to the low achievement in English among Malaysian students. Firstly, less contact hours with English language limit students' exposure to the language. Secondly, the restriction of the English syllabus has caused teachers to make the syllabus not the learners as their focal point of classroom teaching. Thirdly, English is not a prerequisite to certification in the sense that even if candidates fail the subject they can still pass the examination. Fourthly, the shortage of English teachers is still acute especially in the rural schools where many do not even have training in English as a second language (TESL). Finally, learners' attitudes are largely determined by the language-learning situation and by the examination priorities. Hence, many of them are found to be less interested in the class.

Being fully aware of the problems faced by teachers and students in the second language acquisition, endless efforts have been made by the Education Ministry to overcome the existing problems. The recent move is the teaching of English literature in secondary schools. Its rationale is to increase students' language mastery as well as to develop a sense of appreciation towards English language. Besides all

the efforts taken, further attempts should also be made to understand students' learning strategies and learning modalities because these elements may influence their language performance (Brown, 1987). Learning modalities are the individual's natural, habitual and preferred ways of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skills (Reid, 1987). They serve as a means of identifying the importance of various individual characteristics and their effects on learners' achievements (Hyland, 1993).

The interest in learning styles is closely related to the idea of 'learner-centered' instruction as it implies a need to consider information about students when designing methods and content. Teachers cannot assume all students will learn through whatever teaching strategy that they prefer to use. Recognising the importance of adapting curriculum and instruction to students' aptitudes, Keefe (1979) asserted:

"Learning style diagnosis opens the door to placing individualized instruction on a more rational basis. It gives the most powerful leverage yet available to educators to analyze, motivate and assist students in schools. As such, it is the foundation of a truly modern approach to education" (p. 34).

According to Stebbins (1993), understanding learning style preference is beneficial to both teachers and students. For students,

they may accomplish several goals. Firstly, helping students identify 'tools' that are initially built upon their own inclinations and backgrounds and offering them some sense of familiarity may make them less resistant to risk taking and change (Oxford, 1985). Secondly, having the knowledge of own learning styles and the place of learning styles in a culture may help students understand that beliefs and behaviours are not universal but 'natural' to all. These beliefs and behaviours may maximise their L2 proficiency and academic success. Thirdly, if students are from cultures where education is heavily teacher-directed, knowledge of their individual learning style preferences can help them be responsible for their own learning by helping them select learning strategies that will build their innate preferences (Oxford, 1985). Finally, by giving students a sense that they are in control of aspects of their learning process with direct influence on the outcomes can build self-confidence and reinforce the willingness to be risk takers (Stebbin, 1993).

Teachers' identification of students' learning style preferences on the other hand can guide the selection of appropriate instructional methods and materials to maximise students' learning. Knowledge of students' style profiles can be used to guide instructional organisation for individuals or for groups of students with the same style preference (Stebbin, 1993). Secondly, teachers' identification of their own style